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ANENT THE ART OF BEARDSLEY.

There was recently held in Paris an exhibition of the works of Aubrey Beardsley, the English designer and illustrator whose death from consumption in 1898 was the signal for a vigorous discussion of

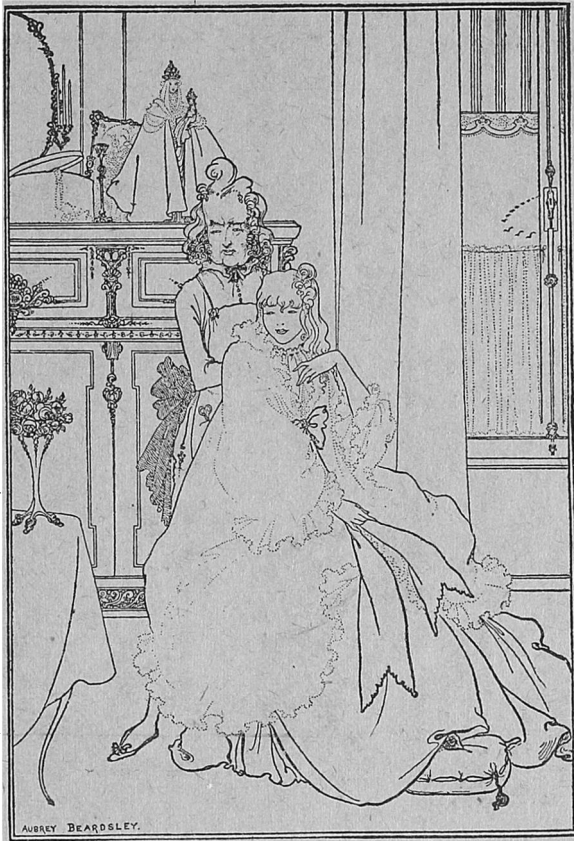


NEW ENGLAND PASTURES
By William S. Robinson
Copyright, 1907, The National Academy of Design

the merits of his work. From the comments of the Paris press it is evident that Paris took Beardsley with terrible seriousness. Led by the Comte de Montesquiou, who had long been one of the most ardent defenders of Beardsley's work, there seems to be rapidly forming a Beardsley cult such as has existed for several years in England. For various reasons this fact is interesting though not necessarily significant.

One of the most notable successes attained by Beardsley was as the illustrator of Oscar Wilde's "Salome." He brought out all the loathsomeness of the details which New York has declined to consider within

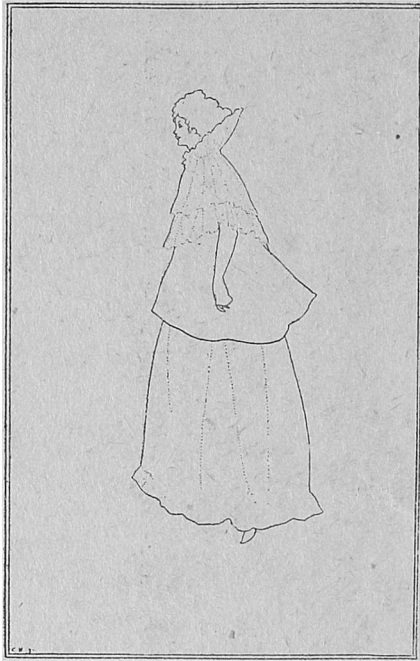
the province of art with a sureness of line and instinctive feeling for the horror of the plot which it is safe to say, no other draughtsman of his day could have attained. It may be unfair to take this as an example of his work. The Comte de Montesquiou would deny that his finest talent was shown in "Salome;" the fact remains that these drawings are peculiarly characteristic of his genius.



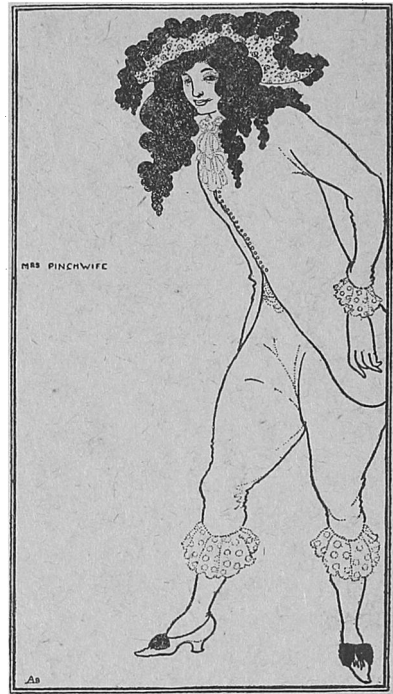
THE COIFFING
By Aubrey Beardsley

That it was a species of genius it would be idle to deny. It was not in any event the highest kind of genius—certainly not worthy of the extraordinary and wholly ill-balanced praise bestowed upon it by several English critics who ought not to have allowed their sense of proportion to be so completely upset as it apparently has been; but it was sufficiently original in kind and finished in technique to be regarded as something distinctly outside the realm of talent. The word talent bespeaks an element of the commonplace and Beardsley, whatever else he was, was not in the least commonplace.

But having said this, is there nothing more to say? It will seem to many persons that there is much that demands saying and that has too often been said carelessly and too rarely been said fairly and without prejudice. It is unnecessary and it is probably unwise to drag into any discussion of Beardsley's art the question of his personality. Even those who admired him most as a draughtsman admit that his life was calculated to increase whatever tendency his pencil had to picture the strange and unnatural rather than the true and the beautiful. But



PORTRAIT OF REJANE
By Aubrey Beardsley



MRS. PINCHWIFE
By Aubrey Beardsley

however strongly his habits of living may have affected his art, it is with that art alone that the public has to do.

The question to be answered is whether that art is in itself sound, or whether it is so tainted with the morbid unreality of a diseased, and almost scorbutic, imagination that it is false to the very nature of true art and is therefore to be regarded as essentially decadent rather than progressive, tending downward rather than upward or outward, malformed and deformed rather than reformed.

It will seem at least to many unprejudiced students and even admirers of Beardsley's extraordinary and unshackled genius that the latter alternative must be accepted as the inevitable reply to the question. Beardsley's art is distinctly unhealthy; his very power depends—more

largely than is usually admitted—upon the appeal made by his drawings to the lower side of human nature, and the skill displayed by him in depicting the visions of delirium should not and cannot be made an excuse for calling such a conception of the mission of art otherwise than by its true name—decay.

Nor would Beardsley have attained the reputation which his name now has had he been free from this decadent tendency. His drawing is good; it is remarkable indeed. But other draughtsmen no less good have gone their way and scarcely received one-half the encomiums that have been lavished upon Beardsley's work. It is therefore upon his imagination alone that Beardsley's fame depends. And that imagination was trailed in the mire to such an extent that none of its products is free from pollution.

R. C.



COLLECTIONS OF FAKES THE NEW FAD.

The genius of collectors has now entered a new field. Many art collectors up to now have purchased forged works of art, believing them to be genuine, and have been happy in their possession, but now the millionaire turns his attention in a new direction, and makes a collection of acknowledged forgeries, and this new hobby is held to be as interesting as it is exciting.

The art of the Vieux Neuf has long been carried on in certain parts of Italy and France. The town of Siena has a school of eminent forgers, men who work with such charm, ingenuity and grace that it is a pity they should desire to deceive, because if their work were sold as genuinely modern it would still be delightful.

Their art is carried to such perfection that a blacksmith is employed in order to make old and rusty nails, ancient hooks and worn hinges, and ever so many other appliances which complete the illusion in frames and cabinets. There are many curios in all our great museums, ivories, porcelain, majolica, etc., which are imitations. They may be of a certain age, but they are not of the date which they profess to be. But to no country do more go than to America. The largest factories for these treasures are to be found in Germany, Russia, Italy and France.

Not long ago some very valuable old family plate was taken to be cleaned to a man who was an undeniable expert and extremely honest. A few days afterward the owner received a note asking her to call, and he showed a curious thing.

The other equally had the hall mark, but it had been inserted in a modern cup and was neatly soldered into the base. It would have been impossible for an amateur to have told the difference. Indeed, the only difference lay in the fact that when the cup was genuine it was worth some 50 pounds, and when the soldered hall mark was removed it was not worth 15 pounds. The forgery must have been committed on some previous occasion when the plate was repaired and the modern substituted for the antique.

L.